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EDITORIAL

Wired or Wary?

The AAAS Board of Directors has given their new Editor-in-Chief the responsibility for planning long-term strategy for *Science*. Implicit in that assignment is the need to determine how best to serve our growing worldwide readership. For the past 4 years, *Science*, with full AAAS support, has substantially expanded its international presence by acquiring overseas editors, reporters, and members of the Board of Reviewing Editors. In addition, the editorial staff concluded some months ago that only by embracing new electronic technologies could we truly serve our international readership. Our first steps in digital communication have been intended to enhance the print publication. Although some readers retain a healthy skepticism toward Web-wired hype, this week marks a dozen issues of *Science* that have had electronic counterparts. Now is a good time to look back, and ahead.

Science and AAAS began offering World Wide Web (WWW) pages with the issue of 23 June 1995 at the URL (uniform resource locator) <http://www.aaas.org>. That issue was devoted to thorny issues of interpersonal conduct in science. To go beyond the printed stories of conflicting relations investigated by our reporters, and to bring to our readers the special interactive benefits provided by Internet communication, the *Science* WWW page led interested browsers to a forum in which a panel of five experts in scientific conduct, whose courses were featured in the printed stories, hosted extended discussions of real and hypothetical conflicts of interest, both intellectual and financial.

The hope that this forum would prove attractive to our readers and stimulate some international participation as well seems to have been realized. According to Features Editor John Benditt, who coordinated that issue, in the 2 months that the on-line conduct forums ran (23 June to 23 August), more than 2500 individuals participated and made more than 50,000 "hits" (or visits) to various parts of the discussion materials. Those electronic visitors came from nearly 30 different countries, including Brazil, China, Hungary, Finland, Malaysia, and Poland, and from every major sector of the Internet—universities, nonprofit organizations, government, and the commercial sector. Lively on-line discussions took place, at times involving more than 70 people in ongoing dialogues. The discussions were so intriguing that *Science* may reprint the entire project separately.

With that week's issue, *Science* also began to offer Web-browsing readers electronic versions of the "This Week in Science" page, the full Table of Contents, the Editorial, and the job recruitment advertising. "Information for Contributors" appeared in both English and Kanji (for our Japanese readers). "The People Behind *Science*" told prospective authors how to contact specific editors, giving information about their scientific backgrounds. The inference that these digital features meet some readers' needs is confirmed by the steady growth in the number of visitors to those pages to well over 100,000 hits each week. The "Beyond the Printed Page" section has featured material that would have been impossible to provide in the printed version (such as the complete genome maps of *Haemophilus influenzae* from the 28 July issue). This week's special section on computers and fluid dynamics has now joined our on-line features. Once again, the Web version adds value to the printed page: links to other sites that give details on computer science research and tours of fluid dynamics simulations. The weeks to come will bring more such supplementary items.

Where do we go from here? *Science* probably will not limit itself to WWW communication—a gopher site has been available for some time as a means for authors, editors, and advertisers to communicate. Perhaps we will emulate offers made by some of our competitors to provide compendia of several years' worth of issues in a searchable format on CD-ROM. *Science* takes the view that in this rapidly moving world of scientific discovery and application, the critical need is not simply for more rapid communication, but for a way to transform floods of data into perspectives that scholars can incorporate into their own evolving views of those elements of the scientific enterprise they choose to follow or sample. Our goal will be to facilitate the dialogue among scientists interested in common topics, methods, or applications, much as we did in our inaugural discussions of scientific conduct. How exactly will we offer these and other electronic reader services? Stay tuned.

Floyd E. Bloom